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UNCLAS ALGIERS 002114

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: REPORTERS SANS FRONTIERES SOUNDS ALARM ON  
BENCHICOU'S WORSENING HEALTH

REF: ALGIERS 1958 (NOTAL)

1. Portions of this cable are sensitive but unclassified.  
Please protect accordingly.

2. (U) The health condition of Mohamed Benchicou, editor-in-chief of the now-defunct French-language daily Le Matin, who was sentenced to two years imprisonment June 14, 2004 for having illegally transferred bonds to France, has worsened significantly over the last month, according to various sources, including Reporters Sans Frontieres. Having long suffered from osteoarthritis on the right side, Benchicou was denied permission for a necessary medical treatment early this year, and his condition has dramatically worsened as a result, according to Saad Lounes, a journalist who visited him in prison October 10.

3. (U) Benchicou, according to his physicians (as communicated by his lawyers), requires surgery to relieve the pressure on a nerve pinched between two vertebra. Reporters Sans Frontieres issued a statement October 14 calling for a medical exam for Benchicou by an independent NGO and asked the International Committee of the Red Cross to intervene on his behalf.

4. (SBU) According to Benchicou's lawyers, who spoke with us October 15, Benchicou is learning how to use his left hand for everything. He has been unable to hold a pen for months, and opening a lid with his right hand causes him intense pain. Benchicou's lawyers made a point of telling us that Benchicou does not want a presidential pardon as part of the recently passed referendum on national reconciliation since he is not a terrorist. His lawyers also confirmed that Benchicou's condition has considerably worsened since the beginning of September. Although Benchicou is imprisoned for currency violations, he and the journalist community maintain those charges were a cover to terminate his propaganda campaign against the President.

SIEVERS